

Non-paper from the Presidents*

EXECUTIVE BOARDS OF UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-WOMEN AND WFP

Discussion Note on Executive Board Working Methods

1. BACKGROUND

The Presidents of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP are committed to improving and streamlining the working methods of their respective Executive Boards, and, to this end, have produced this discussion note in consultation with the Executive Board secretariats.

The Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of operational activities for development of the United Nations System (QCPR), adopted in December 2016, and the recent Secretary-General report on Repositioning the UN Development System to deliver on the 2030 Agenda – Ensuring a Better Future for All¹, have made the review of the working methods of the Board timely. Further, it should be noted that the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS has had previous reviews and decisions on the working methods between 2001 and 2006, which we can build upon². From 1999 to 2005, the WFP Governance Project was carried out by a governance group consisting of Member State representatives from the five regional and electoral Lists to strengthen the governance and make the Executive Board more strategic and efficient through improved information sharing, consensus building and decision-making³. In 2015, UNICEF also prepared a working paper specifically on reducing the number of Board sessions per year, which has been taken into consideration in this note. The working methods of the UN-Women Executive Board were adopted in 2011.

While there is no specific timeframe for concluding this review on the working methods, the Secretariat of UN-Women has circulated a draft letter from the Presidents of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS; UNICEF; WFP and the Bureau of the UN-Women Executive Board requesting the organization of an “inter-Executive Boards task force” to engage in the production of a proposal to respond to the QCPR. If decided by the respective bureaux, the Presidents of the respective Executive Boards may want to propose a timeline for the review.

2. QCPR RESOLUTION

The passages of the QCPR resolution relevant to this discussion note on the working methods of the Boards appear under section IV: *Strengthening the governance of the United Nations operational activities for development*, operational paragraph 46. They are the following:

¹ At the time this note was finalized, the Secretary-General Report had not been presented. This note takes into account content of para 46 QCPR as a basis for discussion and should further integrate the suggestions contained in the SG report once Member states, UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP and the Secretariats of the Boards, fully analyze the SG Report.

² See following documents: DP/2001/CRP.17-DP/FPA/2001/CRP.2; DP/2003/CRP.6; DP/2005/CRP.13; and relevant Board decisions: 2003/1; 2005/32; 2006/7; 2006/14; 2006/25.

³ Final Report on the Governance Project (WFP/EB.2/2005/4-C/Rev.1):

<http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/eb/wfp076984.pdf>.

*The Presidents of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP in 2017.

46. Further stresses the need to enhance system-wide coherence and efficiency, reduce duplication and build synergy across governing bodies of the entities of United Nations development system, and in this regard, calls upon:

(a) The respective bureaux to initiate discussions on improving the working methods of the joint meetings of the Executive Boards so that they offer a platform for exchange on issues with cross-cutting impact;

(b) Member States to initiate discussions on the working methods of the respective governing bodies in order to improve the efficiency, transparency and quality of official sessions, ensure more systematic follow-up by the entities of the United Nations development system on issues raised by their governing bodies and ensure timely follow-up on the implementation of the present resolution;

(c) Entities of the United Nations development system to adopt and abide by clear rules, including on the dissemination of all documents and draft decisions, thereby allowing adequate time for prior consultation with Member States in their decision-making processes;

3. RECENT IMPROVEMENTS

Over the past five years, many changes have been implemented to improve and streamline the working methods of the Executive Boards, including the following:

- **The number of “Informal consultations” and “Board briefings” has increased** significantly in inter-sessional periods to encourage continued dialogue between Member States and the management of UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP.
- More **Joint Briefings of the Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF and UN-Women** are organized every year to encourage inter-agency collaboration, coordination, and coherence.
- The **Joint Meeting of the Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS; UNICEF; UN-Women and WFP has full ownership of Member States**, and it is more of focused on crosscutting issues and coordination amongst UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP.
- Despite an increase in reporting obligations, in order to minimize document processing and translation costs, as well as the number of hours devoted to preparation of official and informal documents, **oral reports and other type of informal reporting have been encouraged**.
- **For UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP, documentation has drastically decreased**, both in terms of number of documents and word count of documents - from 10,500 down to 8,500. In addition, with a few exceptions, sessions are paperless, with documents posted on the Executive Board website and on the PaperSmart portal. Session documents are also posted on the Executive Board website six weeks before a session in English, and available translations are made available on the site four weeks before a session.
- The membership of the **Bureaux of the Boards is now identified earlier** in the year, which allows for more time for prospective Bureau Members to attend Bureau meetings as observers and to ensure more efficient handover from the outgoing to the incoming Bureau.
- **Orientation sessions for new Members of the Executive Boards have been established** each year shortly after the election, in order to provide the new members an overview of programs, the Board’s program of work for the year, and the working methods. Often an informal briefing or briefings are scheduled immediately following the election. Bilateral meetings/discussions are also scheduled with the incoming President and bureau members, as needed.
- The **Bureaux of the Boards meet regularly**, at least once a month, to provide strategic direction to the Board. The Bureau has a stronger role in **ensuring ownership of decision-making by consensus**, and Bureau Members have strengthened their own role as the main interlocutors between the regional groups and the management of UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP.
- **More delegations are delivering joint/group statements**, which has decreased some of the prepared statements by individual delegations, allowing more time for discussion and fostering shared views

across Member States. In addition, through announcements in the *UN Journal* and on the PaperSmart portal, delegates are encouraged to submit their requests to speak before the session, which facilitates advance preparation of an unofficial speakers list.

- In 2017, for the first time, the **Presidents of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF and UN-Women have informally met** several times to discuss issues of common interest, and how to ensure greater coherence of the work of the Executive Boards.
- As mandated by their respective Executive Boards, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP, and UN-Women, for the first time in 2017, **worked on a “common chapter” in their respective Strategic Plans** to highlight their “collaborative advantages”.
- The **Secretaries of the Executive Boards meet regularly** in an attempt to harmonize the calendar of informal briefings, session agendas and other common tasks as much as possible, such as the planning of the annual Joint Field Visit and Joint Meeting of the Boards, as well as exchange of views on thematic areas and efficient Board practices.

For the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF and WFP Boards only

- **A stronger process of approval for Country Programme Documents** was agreed by the Board in decision 2014/7 on *modifications to the procedures for considering and approving UNDP and UNFPA country programme documentation*. The process merged the review and approval periods into one session, thus increasing the efficiency of the approval process. In 2017, WFP began implementation of the new policy for Country Strategic Plan documents, modeled after the Country Programme Documents of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS and UNICEF.
- **The format of the informal consultations and the formal sessions for the Country Programme Documents has changed** to be more efficient, reducing the length of presentations, focusing on regional trends, and allowing more time for discussions relevant to the country level.

4. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS AND PENDING ISSUES

The QCPR provides a good basis for further improvements. The sections below are organized in accordance with the sub-sections (a), (b) and (c) of QCPR operational paragraph 46:

- 1) **Working methods of the joint meeting of the Executive Boards**
- 2) **Working methods of the respective governing bodies**
- 3) **Rules, documentation and decision-making**

1) Working methods of joint meeting of the Executive Boards

The QCPR operational paragraph 46 (a) calls for the respective Executive Boards’ Bureaux to “initiate discussions on improving the working methods of the joint meetings of the Executive Boards so that they offer a platform for exchange on issues with cross-cutting impact.” The following are possible suggestions to respond to the QCPR based on previous Board and Bureau discussions:

- The **Joint Meeting of the Boards (JMB)** is not a decision-making body, and has no designated follow-up. **Strengthening the decision-making capacity of the JMB** can be explored by Member States to give the JMB authority to decide on issues of joint relevance and interest for UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP, which, in turn, may promote inter-agency efficiency, coherence and collaboration.
- **Stronger linkages between issues discussed at the respective Executive Boards and at the JMB.** The JMB should provide opportunities to discuss concrete Board agenda items of mutual interest to the Board Members of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP.

- **Increased JMB focus on joint programming, coordination and coherence.** The JMB should be a space for dialogue and collaboration between UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP and the respective Members of the Boards.
- **The timing of the JMB can also be re-examined.** In 2016 and 2017, the JMB has taken place in June, but, in previous editions, the JMB has taken place in February, though this was too early to have data from the previous year available as a basis for discussion. As Member States’ participation can be linked to the timing of the meeting, further exploring the best calendar option to ensure maximum participation can be explored.
- The practice of organizing joint briefings of the Boards on targeted issues, e.g. cost-recovery, or common elements of the Strategic Plans should continue. **More joint informal briefings of the Executive Boards can be organized throughout the year and in a more ad hoc manner,** on topics of mutual concern that are forward looking to strengthen efficient use of Board members’ and funds and program’s time and foster coordination and discussions on system-wide issues.

2) Working methods of the respective governing bodies

The QCPR operational paragraph 46 (b) also calls for “*Member States to initiate discussions on the working methods of the respective governing bodies in order to improve the efficiency, transparency and quality of official sessions, ensure more systematic follow-up by the entities of the United Nations development system on issues raised by their governing bodies and ensure timely follow-up on the implementation of the present resolution.*”

To address this request and take into account previous Board discussions on this issue this note has organized the section into the following categories:

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| i. Bureau | iv. Participation |
| ii. Sessions | v. Field visits |
| iii. Conduct of business | vi. Inter-agency coordination |

i. Bureau

- Previous suggestions for changes to the Executive Board working methods have recommended that **prospective Bureau members receive their regional group nominations earlier** – between September and November of the preceding year. This would allow the new prospective members to be invited to on-going Bureau meetings as observers and give them adequate time to familiarize themselves with Board issues, Bureau proceedings, and to prepare for the formal handover process. The President of the Bureau, in his/her leadership role, could encourage earlier confirmation of nominations from all regional groups.
- The formal election of Bureau Members can also be advanced. Currently, Bureau members are formally elected two (2) weeks prior to the First Regular Session in January⁴. This is a very short period of time before the First Regular Session takes place. A proposed way forward could be to **convene elections of Bureau members in early December, with the terms of the new Bureau members officially starting on 1 January** of the following year.
- To strengthen the Bureaux ownership and leadership over Board-related issues and on-going dialogue with Management of UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP, the consideration of instituting **longer-term commitments from Bureau Members could be explored.** Currently, Bureau members have 1-year terms, whereas Board members have 3-year terms (with the exception of WEOG, which has its own rotation system). The possibility to have 2-year Bureau member terms could be explored, while bureaux could also be expanded to include e.g. 10 members (two from each regional group), for two year-appointments, changing half of its members each year for a continued institutional memory among bureau members. Also, the level of representation of

⁴ For WFP, the First Regular Session takes place in February.

Bureau members should be kept at the highest possible level, preferably at the Permanent Representative level.

- The rules of procedure of the UN-Women Board allow **Bureau members to serve two consecutive terms**. This has been utilized successfully by some Bureau members.
- Furthermore, a form of “succession planning” could be explored. The practice followed by the UNICEF Executive Board to **elect the new Board President among the Member States holding the Vice Presidency the previous year from the relevant regional group** is noted as a potential practice to replicate at the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board. The UN-Women Executive Board followed this practice in 2017. The WFP Executive Board has been following this practice generally since 2007 upon amendments to the Rules of Procedure to handle succession planning issues⁵.
- At present, the Presidents of the Executive Boards meet informally and irregularly. By **institutionalizing formal meetings** once a month or every couple of months this could increase joint collaboration among the Bureaux, and better coordination between the Boards.

ii. Sessions

- Discussions about the **reduction of the number of formal sessions of the Executive Boards to two sessions per year** has been a recurrent issue in past Bureau discussions. A UNICEF working paper from October 2015 elaborated on this proposal. In 1994, the GA adopted resolution 48/162, which harmonized the proceedings of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP, after which the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Board held four sessions per year: a first regular session in January/February; a second regular session in March/April; the annual session in May/June; and a third regular session in September/October. In 2000, as expressed in the overview of decisions, the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Board agreed to a schedule of future sessions of the Board that reduced the number of sessions from four to three starting in 2001. This was justified by shifting around agenda items for greater efficiency. The Board has continued this practice of holding three sessions per year since 2001. From 2005, WFP also reduced the number of formal sessions from four to three annually (First Regular Session in February, Annual Session in June and Second Regular Session in November).
- In recent years, the First Regular Session of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board has been 3-4 days, the Annual Session has been 5-10 days, and the Second Regular Session has been 3-4 days. The UN-Women Board meets for 1 day for the First Regular Session, 2-3 days for the Annual Session and 2-3 days for the Second Regular Session. The WFP Board meets for 2-3.5 days for the First Regular Session, 4-4.5 days for the Annual Session, and 4 days for the Second Regular Session. By adjusting the scheduling dates of certain agenda items, the **Members of the Board, in consultation with UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP, may wish to explore the possibility to shift all agenda items into two sessions per year**. In examining how to rearrange the Board sessions, the Second Regular Session, in particular, causes preparation and planning difficulties with a very short time frame (10-11 weeks) between the annual (June) and second regular (early September) sessions, implying a short turn around for document processing and review by delegations, which is something echoed in the UNICEF paper, as well. Also, with the second regular session being so close to the start of the High-Level Segment of the General Assembly in early-mid September, delegations in New York are overstretched with preparations for the GA. It has also traditionally been difficult to hold the session later in the year because the GA is still in session and delegations are involved in the work of the committees.

iii. Conduct of business

⁵ See the 2007 WFP Board decision (WFP/EB.2/2007/12-B) on succession planning in the WFP Bureau here: <http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/eb/wfp137868.pdf>. A practice exists for the Alternate Convenor elected in the current year becomes the Convenor in the successive year.

- Board Members and UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP colleagues have requested more **interaction and dialogue** beyond statements and replies between the Board and UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP during the Executive Board plenary sessions. This is partially a consequence of the structure of the sessions with the statements by Members of the Board and presentations from management of UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP taking up much of the time. **Presentations by UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP should be very short as the documents have been online for 4 weeks and should be focused on issues and recommendations for consideration and action by the Executive Board⁶. Debate time among Member States and UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP could be focused on decisions rather than general statements.** The President of each Board could also circulate a list of “key questions/decisions” to better focus the discussion, while still leaving room for other issues to be raised.
- When delegations deliver individual prepared statements, it puts a strain on time. Therefore, it is **encouraged that statements are made on behalf of several delegations, with any formal statements to be shared electronically** on PaperSmart portal. Clear time limits for statements should also be strictly enforced by the President of the Board. The President of the UN-Women Executive Board has introduced strict five-minute time limits for statements by speakers, including presenters. The President of the WFP Board has also introduced the same strict limits and a new microphone system, which has a timer and flashes when the speaker reaches the limit. This has been employed since 2017 in the WFP Executive Board.
- **Management from UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP should limit the length of their presentations** during the formal sessions and save longer presentations for the more technical discussions during the informal consultations.
- In order to further encourage more interactive dialogue, the chair could ask UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP to **respond to comments/questions from Member States at regular intervals**, instead of taking all the questions at once. This would break up the monotony of the sessions and help to avoid duplication of questions. **Invite speakers** to deliver presentations on topics of importance to the Board to support informed decision-making.

iv. Participation

- There have been calls in the past, in addition to the recent ECOSOC Operational Segment in March 2017, to have **better gender balance and regional geographic representation** on the Board. Chairs of regional groups should continue to encourage Member States to designate delegates in a gender-balanced manner as part of the Board meetings. Organizations such as ILO, for instance, have a 30% target for women’s participation and ITU has a gender dashboard online. WFP began tracking women’s participation following the 8th Annual United Nations Governing Bodies Secretariats meeting hosted by UN-Women in July 2016, noting an average of 45% in all meetings.
- UN-Women management has been striving for gender parity in panel discussions during sessions and keeping track of women’s participations in national delegations to Board sessions and in Bureaux.⁷
- If agreed by Member States, **encouraging more civil society participation, academia, private sector and National Committees** in the relevant Board discussions could be explored. Currently, civil society organizations and NGOs with consultative status with ECOSOC, or in the case of WFP, those interested in cooperating with the Programme⁸, may participate in the discussions as observers when invited by the Executive Board.

⁶ Since late 2015, WFP has issued strict internal guidance to staff presenting to keep presentations succinct and to the point; in mid-2016, further guidance and restrictions were imposed as per 6 July 2016 Bureau decision; and in late 2017, additional time reductions have been implemented as per President’s guidance.

⁷ Joint efforts of 23 UN entities led to a publication “Shaping the international agenda: Raising women’s voices in intergovernmental forums” which identified actions to improve women’s participation in governing body meetings.

⁸ See Rule XV.4 of the Rules of Procedure of the WFP Executive Board here: <http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/govman/wfp244037.pdf>.

v. **Field visits**

- Programme countries to be visited by the Board should be in the **early stages of preparing their respective Country Programme Documents (CPDs)**. This would allow Board Members to present the field visit report as one potential input into the consultation process of the CPDs. It should be noted that no CPDs are prepared for the UN-Women Executive Board.
- Ensure that the composition of the **delegations for the Executive Board field visits have adequate high-level representation**, i.e. Ambassadors. This has been cited to be particularly important for meetings with high-level government officials.

vi. **Inter-Agency Coordination**

- To improve the **quality of work programmes, and to avoid duplication and improve collaboration**, the Secretariats of each Executive Board could consult with one another prior to the introduction of work programmes, strategic plans, and other programming-related documents. The Secretariats could then report to Executive Board members on alignment of opportunities and risks.

3) **Rules, documentation and decision-making**

The third sub-bullet in QCPR operational paragraph 46 (c) calls for the *“Entities of the United Nations development system to adopt and abide by clear rules, including on the dissemination of all documents and draft decisions, thereby allowing adequate time for prior consultation with Member States in their decision-making processes.”*

i. **Rules of Procedure**

- The **Executive Boards have clear rules called ‘Rules of Procedure.’** The Rules of Procedure contain text covering many issues, including: *Sessions; Languages; Agenda and documentation; Representation; Bureau; Working groups; Secretariat; Executive Board Secretariat; Public and private meetings; Reports and sound recordings; Conduct of business; Decision-making; Participation of non-members; Relations with the Chief Executives Board for Coordination; Amendment of rules of procedure.*

ii. **Agenda and documentation**

- Limiting the word count from 10,500 to 8,500 has improved the concise nature of the documents. A recurrent request, however, is that **documentation should mainly focus on issues and recommendations** (with any possible options) for consideration and action by the Board. And where possible, the Board would like to be provided with the **financial implications** of any recommendations.
- All official documentation for the UN-Women Board are uploaded 4 weeks before the Executive Board session starts, in accordance with the Rules and Procedures of the Executive Board.
- The timing of receipt of official documentation has been pointed out by Board members as an element requiring improvement. **Exploring how to shorten the time to process and translate documentation** is required while taking into account calls by the Executive Board and by the General Assembly⁹ to recall the importance of strictly observing the resolutions and rules, establishing language arrangements for the different bodies and organs of the United Nations.
- Board members have also suggested the possible need to further **define certain aspects related to documentation**, such as how to treat late papers, when to use unofficial papers/conference room papers or when to simply present oral presentations.

⁹ i.e. General Assembly resolution 67/292

iii. Decision-making

- **Decisions are adopted by consensus among members of the Executive Boards at each regular session.** Decisions are focused and action-oriented, short and without preambular paragraphs. Since 1994, decisions adopted by the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board have been documented by the secretariat. All decisions by the UN-Women Executive Board since its inception have been documented by its secretariat; this also applies to WFP.
- To strengthen accountability to the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Board, in 2016, the Secretariat started **monitoring the status of implementation of the Executive Board decisions** and regularly posting a matrix accessible to all Member States. This practice has also been underway at WFP since 2002. This can also be expanded to the UN-Women Executive Board.
- In order to improve decision-making on the Board, delegations have suggested that the **Bureau highlight issues and recommendations that require consideration and action by the Executive Board.** In order to facilitate this, the Bureau, in consultation with UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP, could more proactively monitor suggested decisions indicated in the annual workplan.
- The **identification of facilitators should occur earlier.** It is important to identify facilitators before the start of each session, but latest by the time of the informal consultations preceding the Board sessions in order to ensure time for enough substantive negotiations. To this end, the 2016 UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Bureau suggested that outreach for facilitators by both the Bureau/Board members and UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP should be strengthened.
- The UNICEF and UN-Women Boards assign facilitators by requesting each Bureau Member to identify one member of their delegation for the different decisions. This practice of **directly linking Bureau Members to the facilitation of Executive Board decisions strengthens the ownership of Bureau Members with the decision-making process** and reinforces their convening power among Members of the Board.
- On the issue of decision-making and dissemination of draft decisions for the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Board, **negotiation of decisions should occur as early as possible after the consideration of the item in plenary to ensure all Members of the Board are equally equipped with substantive information to engage in negotiations.** This practice ensures that all delegations can engage in negotiations regardless of their size or capacity.
- The secretariat **should provide draft decisions approximately two weeks before the formal session.**
- **The dates/times of negotiations should be communicated with proper advance notice.** Draft decisions and related amendments are disseminated on behalf of the facilitators by the Secretariat a minimum of twice a day during the session, with other disseminations as necessary. Hard copies are also disseminated when requested.
- **Deadlines for comments/new proposals by delegations should be considered by the facilitators.**
- Given the **short duration of UN-Women Executive Board sessions, negotiations on draft decisions begin in advance of the formal sessions** to avoid negotiations overlapping with plenary meetings. To accommodate Member States with delegates joining from capitals, the last informal consultation outside of the formal session usually takes place as close to the official session dates as possible.
- **Direct involvement of the President of the Board in the negotiations** has in some cases proven to be of value. As an example, the role of the President of the UN-Women Executive Board in facilitating the decision on the UN-Women Strategic Plan 2018-2021 was key to reaching consensus. Introduction of a chair's text has also been useful to overcome a stalemate.